



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Having A Nerve Block To Manage Rib Fracture Pain

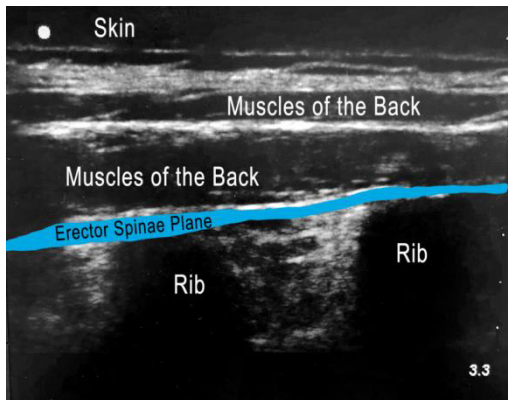
Issued by the Anaesthetics Department

What is a nerve block?

If you have broken ribs, we may offer you a nerve block for the pain. A nerve block is an injection of local anaesthetic around a nerve, which temporarily blocks the pain sensation travelling through that nerve. By blocking individual nerves, parts of the body can be numbed, helping relieve pain in those areas.

How does a nerve block help rib fracture pain?

The nerves to the ribs come out of your back and travel along the ribs around your sides. Pain from broken ribs is carried by these nerves, and so by blocking them, it is possible to relieve some of the pain from rib fractures.



See above ultrasound picture of the Erector Spinae Plane.

Using an ultrasound, we are able to see into your back, close to where these nerves travel. The area we look for is called the Erector Spinae Plane: the Erector Spinae muscles are a group of muscles running down each side of the back, and the plane is the space underneath these muscles. We can precisely inject local anaesthetic into this space. A single injection of local anaesthetic can relieve the pain for several hours, but will eventually wear off. To achieve pain relief for a longer period of time, we can insert a catheter into the Erector Spinae Plane.

A catheter is a little plastic tube that we connect to a pump, which injects more local anaesthetic every few hours.

How do we perform the block?

The nerve blocks are performed in an area of theatre recovery, but this doesn't mean you are having an operation. The anaesthetist will come and speak to you about the block first. When you come to theatres a member of staff will check your details and take you through to the block room.



See above example of the position you will be asked to sit in whilst having the nerve block.

Please discuss with your anaesthetist if you would like to receive medication through your drip that helps you to relax during the nerve block. Before, during and after your block your vital signs (breathing, blood pressure and heart rate) will be monitored, and the anaesthetist will insert a cannula into one of your veins if you do not have one already.

The anaesthetist will explain what they are doing as they go. A special needle is used to place the block, and catheter, and having it done is usually no more painful than receiving a normal injection. The block can take between 20-30 minutes to perform.

You will usually be asked to sit up with your legs over the side of the bed while the block is being performed.

What are the benefits of an Erector Spinae Plane Block or catheter?

- **Better pain relief**
There may be less need for strong pain relief medicines which make some people feel sick and unwell.
- **Being able to breathe more effectively**
It is really important in rib fractures that you are able to take deep breaths and cough if you need to, this allows you to clear your lungs of bacteria and prevents chest infections.

What are the risks?

Risks cannot be removed completely, but the use of ultrasound technology, and education and training have made nerve blocks a much safer procedure in recent years. Anaesthetists take a lot of care to avoid any complications - your anaesthetist will be able to give you more information about the risks and the precautions taken to avoid them.

- **Failure (between 1 in 10 and 1 in 50)**
The block may not work, or stop working earlier than expected. If a nerve catheter is inserted, it may stop working.
- **Damage to a blood vessel**
This is easily resolved by applying pressure to stop the bleeding.

- **Infection**

The nerve block is performed under sterile conditions, and infection is rare. If a nerve catheter is placed, the ward team will check it daily to ensure it remains clean.

- **Nerve damage**

Permanent nerve damage is extremely rare.

- **Adverse reaction to the local anaesthetic (very rare):**

Anaesthetists are specially trained to treat these conditions should they occur.

What happens afterwards?

After the nerve block and catheter have been inserted, the catheter will be connected to a small pump, and placed in a bag that you can carry around. The ward staff will make sure you receive the local anaesthetic from the pump. A member of the acute pain team will also come to see you each day until the catheter is removed.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns following your block please contact us on: 0344 811 8111 – **ask to speak to the on-call anaesthetist.**

Notes

Notes

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: **01670 511098**

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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